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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS, G/TIP, AND DRL  
USAID FOR ASIA BUREAU

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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA TIER 2 ANNOUNCEMENT: GOVERNMENT PLEDGES  
TO DO MORE

¶1. (U) Summary: During a June 5 meeting with Charge d'Affaires, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Minister of Interior Sar Kheng expressed pleasure that the U.S. had recognized Cambodia's hard work to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) by placing Cambodia on Tier 2 for 2008, and pledged that the government will do more. Following the meeting, the Charge and the DPM held a joint press conference with 45 media representatives -- more media reps than the Mission has counted at other Embassy affiliated press conferences. Sar Kheng reiterated his message in comments to the press, stating that Cambodia aspires to be a Tier 1 country fully compliant with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). During the press conference, questions were taken regarding recent reports by prostitutes' rights groups that a recently intensified effort to shut down brothels has led to the abuse of prostitutes while in security force detention, and to a lack of access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. On TIP and HIV/AIDS, the Charge responded that this is not an "either-or" proposition -- we need to think of strategies that will work to target both U.S. priorities. End summary.

Cambodia Pleased With Tier Rating, Seeks To Do More  
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¶2. (SBU) The Charge officially delivered the news of Cambodia's Tier 2 ranking to DPM Sar Kheng on June 5. The DPM said it was with "extreme happiness" that he received the news of being upgraded from Tier 2 Watch List, and that he was pleased that the U.S. Government had recognized Cambodia's hard work to combat TIP. He said that Cambodia's success cannot be disconnected from the cooperation and assistance of the U.S. through which Cambodia has gained experience and ideas that will be the basis for the country's future work. Sar Kheng, who had clearly read the report carefully, remarked that he is not yet satisfied with Cambodia's anti-TIP efforts and agreed with the TIP Report's recommendations. During a joint press conference following the meeting, Sar Kheng was honest in recognizing remaining challenges and told the press that Cambodia will strive over time to reach a Tier 1 rating. (Note: DPM and Minister of Interior Sar Kheng has largely led Cambodia's anti-TIP efforts from the highest levels of the government, and currently serves as the head of the government's High Level Working Group overseeing the Cambodian anti-TIP National Task Force (NTF). End note.)

Anti-TIP Inter-Agency Cooperation Is Key  
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¶3. (SBU) During the meeting, Sar Kheng noted what he believes are some of the most significant achievements over the past year including greater government inter-agency cooperation in combating TIP, and improved cooperation with NGOs, international actors, and others that work on this issue. He mentioned he has also seen cooperation between the

government and restaurant, hotel, and entertainment establishment owners.

14. (SBU) The DPM reflected on internal meetings held over the past year with MOI, Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), and other NTF officials that put into place the steps to accomplish the significant activities mentioned in the TIP Report this year. He specifically mentioned meetings regarding the structuring of the National Task Force and the High Level Working Group as an oversight mechanism. He said the government remains committed to holding meetings about the next steps for the country, including implementation of the new anti-TIP law. The Charge commented on the RGC's recognition and ownership of its TIP problem, its willingness to address the issue, and its continued determination to act on behalf of its most vulnerable citizens.

Questions on TIP, HIV/AIDS; Reports of Prostitutes Abused  
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15. (U) DPM Sar Kheng took questions regarding recent reports by prostitutes' rights groups that the RGC's anti-TIP efforts have led to brothel closures where HIV/AIDS and reproductive health workers previously had access to provide prevention information and condoms. Reports have indicated that prostitutes fear they will be targeted by police if they actively seek such health services. In addition, the DPM took a question about related reports that brothel raid activity has resulted in detained prostitutes being raped or otherwise abused by police and security guards while in detention. The DPM said the RGC would investigate these allegations, with both MOI and the Ministry of Women's

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Affairs playing a role, along with the NTF.

16. (U) Some of the rights groups are critical of the country's new anti-TIP law as the "instigator" of the targeting of prostitutes. Sar Kheng said that the RGC stands by its own law -- a law that is not meant to be an attack on prostitutes but to stop pimps and others benefiting from exploitation. He insisted that the government's efforts are not stopping here and that the NTF and the ministries involved will continue to be leaders in the efforts to stop TIP and to look at all of the issues involved.

17. (U) According to PAO, the joint press conference drew more than 45 media representatives, a larger showing than any other U.S. Mission-affiliated press conference he's seen at post. Press coverage overall was non-sensational and accurately portrayed accomplishments and remaining challenges. Some of the media reports also highlighted issues raised by the groups working with prostitutes.

Comment  
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18. (SBU) One local English press article on the TIP Report announcement quoted two anti-TIP NGO representatives who welcomed the tier rating news, one stating that it serves as evidence that anti-trafficking efforts are working. After a year of hard work by the RGC to better address its TIP problems, it is noteworthy that the government is not resting on its laurels. While we understand that Sar Kheng was elated by news of Cambodia's upgrade, he was quite focused during both our private meeting and the press conference on the need for continued attention to this still-immense problem. Backed by senior members of the NTF, he presented the picture of a serious, all-of-government commitment. Even as the government faces a backlash from groups critical of its policies the RGC has remained open to information and suggestions to help it improve.  
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